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By John Johns.

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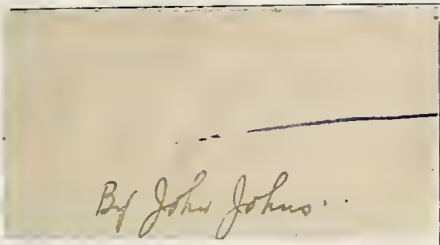

WILMINGTON DURING THE BLOCKADE.

BY A LATE CONFEDERATE OFFICER.

AFTER the capital of the Confederacy there was not in the South a more important place than the little town of Wilmington, North Carolina, about twenty miles from the mouth of the Cape Fear River, noted in peace times for its exports of tar, pitch, turpentine, and lumber. The banks of the Cape Fear had been settled by Sir Walter Raleigh's emigrants and Scotchmen, and to this day you find the old Highland names, and see strongly-marked Scottish features among the inhabitants. The people still retain many of the traits of their descent, and are shrewd, canny, money-making, and not to be beaten at driving a bargain by any Yankee that we ever saw. They are hospitable, intelligent, and polished; many old families, who for years have lived in affluence and luxury, residing there, who have intermarried with each other until they form a large "cousinhood," as they call it.

Previous to the war Wilmington was very gay and social. But the war had sadly changed the place—many of the old families moving away into the interior, and those who remained, either from altered circumstances or the loss of relatives in battle, living in retiracy. When we first knew it, Major-General W. H. C. Whiting was in command. He was an old army officer, who for a long time had been stationed at Smithville, near the Old Inlet at the mouth of the river, where prior to the war there had been a fort and a garrison, though for some years disused. Whiting was one of the most accomplished officers in the Southern army. He was a splendid engineer, and having been engaged in the Coast Survey for some time on that portion of the coast, knew the country thoroughly, the capability of defense, the strong and the weak points. His manners were brusque, but he had a kind and generous heart. He was fond of the social glass, and may have sometimes gone too far. He was not popular with many of the citizens, as he was arbitrary, and paid little attention to the suggestions of civilians. He was a very handsome, soldierly-looking man, and though rough sometimes in his manners, he was a gentleman at heart, incapable of any thing mean or low, and of undaunted courage. Peace to his ashes!

On Whiting's staff were three young officers of great promise: his brother-in-law, Major J. H. Hill, of the old army, now an active express agent at Wilmington; Major Benjamin Sloan, his ordnance officer, now teaching school somewhere in the mountains of South Carolina; and Lieutenant J. H. Fairley, a young Irishman, who had been many years in this country, and who hailed from South Carolina. Fairley was noted in the army as a daring scout and very hard rider, withal one of the quietest and most modest of men. He is now drumming for a dry-good house in New York, instead of inspecting the outposts. We wonder if he recollects the night when the writer hereof picked up a rattlesnake in his blanket at Masonboro Sound.

Whiting scarcely ever had enough troops at his command to make up a respectable Confederate Division. In '64 he had at Wilmington Martin's Brigade, which was a very fine and large one, composed of four North Carolina regiments, remarkably well officered; two or three companies of heavy artillery in the town, doing provost and guard duty; at Fort Caswell, at the mouth of the Old Inlet on the Western Bar, a battalion of heavy artillery and a light battery; at Smithville a similar battalion; at Baldhead, opposite Caswell, an island, Col. Hedrick's North Carolina regiment, about 600 men effective; at Fort Fisher Lamb's North Carolina regiment, about 700 effective men; a company at Fort Anderson; a company of the 7th C. S. cavalry at the ferry over New River, 60 miles northeast of Wilmington, on the Sound; two companies of cavalry, a light battery, and a company of infantry at Kenansville, 40 miles north of Wilmington and 7 miles west of the Weldon Railroad. These, with two or three light batteries scattered along the Sound, from a little above Fort Fisher up to Toprail, constituted in the spring of '64 the whole Confederate force in the Department of Cape Fear.

With this force, and Whiting's skill and bravery, we military men thought we could hold Wilmington. For we justly regarded the General as one of the few eminently fit appointments that the War Department had made. It certainly made some curious selections, *e.g.*, the placing of the dashing, impetuous Van Dorn in command of a Department—the last place in the world he was suited for—instead of giving him a cavalry command of 10,000 men and placing him in the Trans-Mississippi Department. Had the latter been done the Federals would have found Van Dorn a troublesome customer in Missouri. But in Whiting we had implicit faith. So, though there were constant rumors of expeditions against the place we scarcely believed they were coming, so long had the thing been delayed, and, in fact, an attack was wished for by the youthful Hotspurs to relieve the monotony of the garrison life at Caswell, Baldhead, and Fisher. Wiser people knew better. In fact we had lapsed into a dream of security, or thought, at least, the evil day was far off. We ate, drank, and were merry, and there was marrying and giving in marriage, as in the days before the flood.

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It seemed singular to us that the United States should so long neglect to close the only port almost of the Confederacy into which every "dark of the moon" there ran a half dozen or so swift blockade-runners, freighted with cannon, muskets, and every munition of war—medicines, cloth, shoes, bacon, etc. Through that port were brought till January '65 all the stores and material needed by the indefatigable Colonel Gorgas, the Confederate Chief of Ordnance, the most efficient bureau officer the Confederacy had. Through it came those famous Whitworth and Armstrong guns sent us by our English friends. Into Wilmington was brought by Mr. Commissary-General Northrup that rotten, putrid bacon called "Nassau," because it had spoiled on the wharves of that place before reshipped for Wilmington. It was coarse Western bacon, bought by Confederate emissaries at the North; and many a time have we imprecated curses both loud and deep on poor old Northrup's devoted head as we worried down a piece of the rancid stuff. We must say, in all candor, that he was impartial in his distribution of it, and ordered it given to both Confederate trooper and Federal prisoner. Northrup himself ate none of it; he lived on rice—of which he would buy a hogshead at a time from the Commissariat. We became so vitiated in our taste by eating it that at last we came to prefer it to good bacon, and liked the strong, rancid taste. We could not afford to permit our stomachs to cut up any shines, and forced them to stand any and every thing by breaking them into it.

But the cargoes of those white painted, bird-like looking steamers that floated monthly into Wilmington, producing such excitement and joy among its population, unfortunately for the Confederates did not contain Government stores and munitions of war alone, bad as the bacon and much of the stuff bought abroad by worthless Confederate agents were. The public freight compared with the private was small. By them were brought in the cloth that made the uniforms of those gayly-decked clerks that swarmed the streets of Richmond with military titles, and read the battle bulletins and discussed the war news. From that source came the braid, buttons, and stars for that host of "Majors"—who were truly fifth wheels, and did not even have the labor of "following the Colonel around"—with which the Confederacy was afflicted. From it came the fine English brandies, choice foreign wines, potted meats, and conserves, jellies, and anchovy paste, etc., that filled the pantries and store-rooms of many of the officials at Richmond, and were spread out in such profusion at the dinners or suppers or déjeuners given by the "court circle" (as it was called) to officials when the "circle" wanted any of their pets promoted or assigned to good positions. From it came the loaf-sugar, coffee, tea, etc., that staff-officers, blockade-runners, and their relations and friends luxuriated in, while the ragged, dirty Confederate soldier, musket in hand, broiled or soaked in the trenches before Richmond and Petersburg, watching the foe with stout heart but faint stomach; starving on a handful of meal and a pint of sorghum molasses, probably varied every other day with the third or quarter of a pound of Mr. Commissary-General Northrup's savory "Nassau Bacon." Meanwhile his wife and little ones suffering in their far-off Southern home for the necessaries of life. It was this that broke the spirit of the Southern army, and caused such numerous desertions from General Lee's camp during the memorable winter of '64 and '65.

In fact there were numbers of Confederate officers, during the period blockade-running came under our view, whose sole business it seemed to be to lay in in that way stocks of groceries and dry-goods, and by speculating and shipping cotton from Wilmington and Charleston to lay by gold in case of an evil day. Many of them came out of the war rich men, and doubtless with comfortable consciences, for who respects or likes a poor man? We will say, however, that we never heard of but two officers of high rank who were accused of this; and one thing was very certain, that Henry Whiting's skirts were clear of such transactions, and that he left his family badly off. It was the small fry generally who engaged in this discreditable business, to the neglect of their soldierly avocations, men who had been either in the retail grocery or dry-goods business before the war, and who could not keep their hands from such pickings, or get over their old "store" habits. It was seldom you caught a West Pointer at this trading business, poor as most of them were, though it must be confessed that two or three of them did fall from grace in this particular.

Talk about Yankees worshiping the almighty dollar! You should have seen the adoration paid the Golden Calf at Wilmington during the days of blockade-running. Every body was engaged in it save the private soldiers and a few poor line and staff officers, who were not within the "ring," and possessed no influence or position there by which they could grant favors.

When a steamer came in, men, women, children rushed down to the wharves to see it, to buy, beg, or steal something. Every body wanted to know if their "ventures"—the proceeds of the bales of cotton or boxes of tobacco sent out—had come in. No people were more excited than the women, expecting gloves, parasols, hoop-skirts, corsets, flannels, and bonnets, silks and calicoes; for these things became frightfully scarce and dear in the South during the last year of the war. The first people aboard of course were the agents—on such occasions very big men. Then swarmed officials and officers, "friends" and "bummers," hunting after drinks and dinners, and willing to accept any compliment, from a box of cigars or a bottle of brandy down to a bunch of bananas or a pocketful of oranges. Happy the man who knew well and intimately the steward of a blockade-runner, or could call the cook his friend, and get a part

of the stealings from the pantry or the drippings from the kitchen!

How it made those bluff, coarse, vulgar Englishmen stare, who came in as pursers or officers, to see well-dressed gentlemen thus degrading themselves by sponging and loafing and disgracing their uniforms! We have seen many a fellow, bearing a commission, for hours eying from a stand-point on the wharf a blockade-runner as a cat would a mouse, and then just about lunch-time drop aboard to enjoy the Champagne or porter, the sardines or Parmesan and English cheese. We never heard them express it, but we can imagine the intense disgust that such men as John Wilkinson, Robert Carter, and other old navy officers, who occasionally commanded such ships, must have felt at this method some of their Confederate brethren had of living at other people's expense.

As for ourselves, we never had the pleasure of this sort of thing but twice. Once by invitation of our friend George Baer (*alias* Captain Henry), who immortalized himself by writing that celebrated protest as to the capture of the *Greyhound*, and by his escape from his captors in Boston. Baer invited us to a fashionable 10 o'clock breakfast on the *Index*, which he then commanded, and the consequence was we nearly stuffed ourselves to death, and came near having an apoplectic fit. The second time we went by invitation on board the *Advance* to dinner, and were treated like a "snob," as we deserved to be, for our pains. We shall never forget the cool stare of the steward when we had the audacity to ask for a second piece of pie. We ate it—humble pie indeed—and that awful man's look, which we shall never forget to our dying day, though it came near killing, cured us of any propensity of dining and wining on board blockade-runners. We loved fresh meat and Champagne dearly, but we never sought it again in that quarter.

Wilmington during that period swarmed with foreigners, Jews and Gentiles. In fact, going down the main street or along the river, you might well imagine you were journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho. As to the falling among thieves we will make no mention. The beggars at the gangways of the newly-arrived steamers were as thick as those in Egypt crying "bucksheesh."

At every turn you "met up," as our tar-heel friends say, with young Englishmen dressed like grooms and jockeys, or with a peculiar coachmanlike look, seeming, in a foreign land, away from their mothers, to indulge their fancy for the *outré* and extravagant in dress to the utmost. These youngsters had money, made money, lived like fighting-cocks, and astonished the natives by their pranks, and the way they flung the Confederate "stuff" about. Of course they were deeply interested in the Confederate cause, and at the same time wanted cotton. The Liverpool house of Alexander Collie and Co. had quite a regiment of these youngsters in their employ. Fine-looking fellows, with turned-up noses, blue eyes wide apart, and their fluffy, straw-colored, mutton-chop whiskers floating in the wind, to the great admiration of their *chèr amiés*, the handsome quadroon washer-women, on whose mantle-pieces and in whose albums were frequently to be found photographs strikingly resembling the aforesaid young foreigners. They occupied a large flaring yellow house, like a military hospital, at the upper end of Market Street, and which belonged to a Mr. Wright. There these youngsters kept open house and spent their pas' and the Company's money, while it lasted. There they fought cocks on Sundays, until the neighbors remonstrated and threatened prosecution. A stranger passing the house at night, and seeing it illuminated with every gas-jet lit (the expense, no doubt, charged to the ship), and hearing the sound of music, would ask if a ball was going on. Oh no! it was only these young English Sybarites enjoying the luxury of a band of negro minstrels after dinner. They entertained any and every body, from Beauregard and Whiting, or Lawley, the voluminous correspondent of the London *Times*, down to such "bummers" as Vizitelly or the most insufferable sponge or snob who forced his society upon them.

But alas! there came a day when these Masters Primrose, with brandy-flushed faces, faded away, and were scattered like their namesakes before a chilling northeast wind, and Wilmington knew them no more. We doubt not that the population of Wilmington, both white and colored, miss and mourn them sadly.

Of course there were many American houses, and American agents representing English houses, some of whom would fain have aped the hospitality of these young Britishers if they could; and others who upon no account would have done so. There were Crenshaw and Brothers, Confederate Government Agents; Ficklin and Finney, Agents for the State of Virginia; Mitchell and Gervey, of Charleston, Agents of the Bee Line; Salomons and Co., of New Orleans; and a host of others of less importance, or no importance at all. Of course they all made fortunes—some at the expense of their country, some at the expense of their companies; which latter, in consequence, often had small dividends to make.

The tribe of Benjamin was very well represented at Wilmington, as you may imagine, the unctuous and oleaginous Confederate Secretary of State having well provided for "his people." A great many gentlemen of strongly Jewish physiognomy were to be met with on the streets, in very delicate health, and with papers in their pockets to keep them out of the army from the Secretary of State, but still in hot pursuit of the "monish." When the conscript officer became very zealous and pressing they fled away to Nassau and Bermuda. We recollect, upon one occasion, when a very distinguished naval officer in the Confederate service was going to run the blockade, three men, representing themselves

as being intended for the crew of a Confederate cruiser abroad, presented themselves with notes from a high Government official, requesting that passage be furnished them to Nassau. Lieutenant J—— told them:

"Gentlemen, if I take you under these circumstances, you can not go as passengers; you will have to go in the forecastle, as common sailors."

"Very well," said they; "any way will do."

So they went out with the nominal purpose of joining the crew of the cruiser that was being fitted out in Europe. When the vessel got to Nassau, in a few days one of the party had his sign up as a practicing physician; the other had gone into business in a store; and the third came to Lieutenant J——, and begged him to take him as his steward.

"Why," said the officer, "you are a gentleman by birth and education; you are not fitted to be a steward—a waiter."

"Never mind," replied the unhappy impecunious individual; "I am out of money, and must do something."

There were many other such instances of refugees from conscription. In Richmond they used to get through the lines in coffins. At Wilmington scarce a steamer went out without some "stowaways," whom it was not always possible to smoke out, or without some weak-kneed individual who, by hook or crook, in some mysterious way managed to get a passport and to escape the conscript officer.

The Confederate Government used to send some queer agents abroad at the expense of the people. A Mrs. Grinnell was sent out by the Surgeon-General—so she stated—to get bandages, etc., which nobody else, we suppose, but Mrs. Grinnell could get. She was an Englishwoman, of that class and with those manners which any man, if he has traveled much, has often seen. She gave herself out as a daughter of an English baronet, and had first come to New York several years prior to the war. Then there was Belle Boyd, who represented herself, we believe, as an agent sent out by Mr. Benjamin. She was captured, with our friend George Baer, on the *Greyhound*. Another was a Mrs. Baxley, of Baltimore. She represented herself, we believe, as an agent of old Mr. Memminger—that compeer of Gallatin and Neckar—who, by-the-way, ever since the surrender has been hiding away somewhere up in the mountain fastnesses of South Carolina, in mortal terror; and who, whenever he hears of even a bureau agent in the shape of a chaplain being in the neighborhood, immediately hies himself off to his retreat, not to reappear till the representative of the United States has departed the vicinity. The fact is, the United States ought to send old Mr. Memminger a free pardon and grant him a pension. He did about as much as any other man we know of to break down the Confederacy. Mallory should be taken care of for life. And as for Benjamin, the United States never can repay the debt of gratitude it owes him for having, by his unfortunate counsels, assisted it in the destruction of "the rebellion." They should send a public ship to bring Benjamin back to his sorrowing country, which so deeply mourns his loss.

Mr. Mallory's navy was always the laughing-stock of the army, and many were the jeers that the Confederate "mud-crushers" let off at his iron-clads, formidable things as they were, had he managed properly the Confederate navy. Captain Lynch was the flag-officer of the Cape Fear squadron when we first went there. His fleet consisted of the iron-clad ram *North Carolina*, which drew so much water that she could never get over the bars of the Cape Fear River Inlet—except, possibly, at the highest spring-tide, and then the chances were against her ever getting back again; the *Raleigh*, another iron-clad, not completed till late in the summer of '64; and two or three little steam-tugs. They all came to grief. The *North Carolina*, the bottom of which was neither sheathed nor prepared to resist the worms, was pierced by them till her hull was like a honey-comb, and finally was sunk opposite Smithville. The *Raleigh*, after going out and scaring off the blockading fleet at the New Inlet, was beached and lost on a bar near Fort Fisher in returning. The tugs were burned on the river subsequent to the evacuation of the town.

Whiting and Lynch from some cause or other never were on good terms, jealous of each other's authority, we suppose. It finally came near culminating seriously. There had been an order sent by Mr. Mallory to Lynch, in pursuance of an act of the Confederate Congress, not to let any vessel go out without taking out a certain proportion of Government cotton. Lynch was commander of the naval defenses of the Cape Fear. By some oversight the Adjutant-General's office at Richmond had sent no such order to Whiting, who commanded the Department, and consequently the port and its regulations. One of Collie's steamers was about to go out without complying with the law. Old Lynch sent a half company of marines on board of her and took possession. This Whiting resented rather haughtily as an unwarrantable interference with his authority as Commander of the port, and marching in a battalion of the Seventeenth North Carolina Regiment, under Lieutenant-Colonel John C. Lamb, ejected the marines, and took possession of the steamer and hauled her up stream to her wharf. Lynch said he did not care how far Whiting took her up the river, but he vowed if any attempt was made to take her to sea he would sink her, and he shotted his guns. Matters looked squally and excitement was high. A collision was feared. They were both summoned to Richmond to explain, and both returned apparently satisfied. Lynch, however, was shortly afterward relieved, and Commodore Pinckney took his place.

We had often wondered why the port was not more effectually closed. To tell the truth it was hardly closed at all. Many of the block-

ade-runners continued their career till the fall of Fisher. An experienced captain and good engineer invariably brought a ship safe by the blockading squadron. Wilkinson and Carter never failed—good sailors, cool, cautious, and resolute they ran in and out without difficulty many times. The great danger was from the exterior line of the blockaders some forty or fifty miles out.

But owing to the configuration of the coast it is almost impossible to effect a close blockade. The Cape Fear has two mouths, the Old Inlet, at the entrance of which Fort Caswell stands, and the New Inlet, nine miles up the river, where Fisher guards the entrance. From the station off the Old Inlet, where there were usually from five to six blockaders, around to the station off the New Inlet, a vessel would have to make an arc of some fifty miles, owing to the Frying Pan Shoals intervening, while from Caswell across to Fisher it was only nine miles. The plan of the blockade-runners coming in was to strike the coast thirty or forty miles above or below the Inlets, and then run along (of course at night) till they got under the protection of the forts. Sometimes they got in or out by boldly running through the blockading fleet, but that was hazardous, for if discovered, the ocean was alive with rockets and lights, and it was no pleasant thing to have shells and balls whistling over you and around you. The chances were, then, that if you were not caught, you had, in spite of your speed, to throw a good many bales of cotton overboard.

The wreck of these blockade-runners not unfrequently occurred by being stranded or beached, and highly diverting skirmishes would occur between the blockaders and the garrisons of the forts for the possession. The fleet, however, never liked the Whitworth guns that we had, which shot almost with the accuracy of a rifle and with a tremendous range. The soldiers generally managed to wreck the stranded vessels successfully, though oftentimes with great peril and hardship. It mattered very little to the owners then who got her, as they did not see much of what was recovered—the soldiers thinking they were entitled to what they got at the risk of their lives. But a wreck was a most demoralizing affair—the whole garrison generally got drunk and staid drunk for a week or so afterward. Brandy and fine wines flowed like water; and it was a month perhaps before matters could be got straight. Many accumulated snug little sums from the misfortunes of the blockade-runners, who generally denounced such pillage as piracy; but it could not be helped.

We recollect the wrecking of the *Ella* off Baldhead in December, '64. She belonged to the Bee Company of Charleston, and was a splendid new steamer, on her second trip in, with a large and valuable cargo almost entirely owned by private parties and speculators. She was chased ashore by the blockading fleet, and immediately abandoned by her officers and crew, whom nothing would induce to go back in order to save her cargo. Yankee shells flying over, and through, and around her had no charms for these sons of Neptune. Captain Badham, however, and his company, the Edenton (N. C.) Battery, with Captain Bahnson, a fighting Quaker from Salem, N. C., boarded and wrecked her under the fire of the Federals—six shells passing through the *Ella* while they were removing her cargo. The consequence was that for a month afterward nearly the whole garrison were on "a tight," and groceries and dry-goods were plentiful in that vicinity. The general demoralization produced by "London Dock" and "Hollands" seemed even to have affected that holy man, the Chaplain, who said some very queer graces at the head-quarter's mess-table.

Seldom, however, was there any loss of life attending these wrecks. But there was one notable case of the drowning of a famous woman, celebrated for her beauty and powers of fascination. We allude to the death of Mrs. Greenhow, so well known for many years in Washington circles. Before she even crossed the Confederate lines she had undoubtedly rendered valuable service to the authorities at Richmond, and was in consequence imprisoned by the Federal authorities in Washington. After coming to Richmond and laboring in the hospitals there for some time she sailed for Europe from Wilmington, and it was on her return trip that she was drowned, just as she reached the shores of the South. She had lived past her beauty's prime, had drank deep of fashion and folly's stream of pleasure, had received the admiration and adulation of hundreds of her fellow-mortals, and had reached that point in life when those things no longer please but pall on the senses. Her time had come. The small boat in which she was coming from the vessel, which was beached just a short distance above Fisher, upset. Mrs. Greenhow, after sinking several times, was brought to shore, but soon after reaching it died. It was said that the gold she had sewed up and concealed about her person had borne her down and was the cause of her death; that had it not been for that weight she would have been saved. Her body was brought to Wilmington and laid out in the Sailors' Church, where we saw her. She was beautiful in death. After her funeral her wardrobe and a great many articles that she had brought over for sale, and which had been rescued from the wreck, were sold at auction in Wilmington. It was very splendid, and the "venture" she had brought in for sale was most costly. It was said that an English countess or duchess had an interest in this venture, and was to have shared the profits of the speculation.

But the storm was soon to rain on our devoted heads. Those white-painted steamers, clipping the water so nimbly, with the British and Confederate flags flying, with their brandies and wines, their silks and calicoes, their bananas and oranges, and gladdening the hearts

of the dwellers on the bank of the Cape Fear, were soon to disappear from its waters, and the glory of Wilmington to depart.

Day after day we had watched the blockading fleet with the naked eye and a glass, and often thought what a lonely time those fellows must be having, and longed for some northeast storm to send them on the coast, in order that we might have the pleasure of their acquaintance. Cushing's, by-the-way, we came very near making, when that daring officer came up the Cape Fear in June, we think it was, '64, passing through the New Inlet by Fort Fisher with a boat's crew of some eighteen or twenty sailors and marines, and, landing half-way between the town and the fort, concealed his boat in a creek, and laid *perdu* on the Wilmington and Fisher road, waiting for Whiting or Lamb to come along. A mere accident enabled us to escape him; and though of no importance ourself, we had papers with us at the time that would have been highly interesting to the United States Government. We all of us admired his courage, and thought it deserved success. We well remember delivering Cushing's message (repeated to us by the old citizen whom he caught and released) to General Whiting, that "he had been in Wilmington, and would have him or Colonel Lamb shortly."

On December 24, '64, the armada commanded by Butler and Porter appeared off the coast. That day the United States forces under Butler landed, and the bombardment of Fisher commenced, and such a *feu d'enfer* as was poured on that devoted fort was never seen. Coming up the river from Smithville on a steamer that afternoon we witnessed it, and such a roar of artillery we never heard. Those large double-enders seemed to stand in remarkably close to the fort, and deliver their fire with great accuracy, knocking up the sand on the ramparts. It seemed a continuous hail of shot and shell, many of them going over Fisher and dropping in the river. But Fisher was a long sand fort, stretching in an obtuse angle from the river bank around to the mouth of the New Inlet, that opened into the ocean. It was over a mile from point to point. Though it was thus heavily bombarded for two days, little or no impression was made on its works except to give them a ragged appearance, and very few casualties occurred, the garrison sticking mostly to their bomb-proofs, which were very complete. Whiting was there in command in person, having been sent there by Bragg, of which latter personage presently.

On Saturday night, Christmas-eve, Butler's powder-ship was exploded. It appears to have made no impression on the fort or the garrison, but we must confess those 300 tons of powder going off made us, though twenty miles off, feel very weak in the knees, and shook our nerves considerably, for we did not know what it was at first, nor what had occurred. About 2 A.M. we were quietly asleep in our quarters with our wife and little one by our side, when this terrible explosion occurred. It must have been heard with greater effect in Wilmington than at the fort, possibly from the fact that the wind was setting in that direction, though the town was twenty miles off. There came in the dead of night that awful noise; the earth seemed to heave, the house shook violently, as if the walls were going to fall out and the roof coming down on us. The baby slept quietly on in its cradle; our better-half clung to us, and hysterically insisted that we should say the Lord's Prayer. Though very familiar with it and the rest of the Bible, to save our lives we could not recollect it. Butler's powder-ship had completely knocked all of our memory out of us. We do not believe we could at that moment have told our own name, so completely had the terrific noise upset us.

The next day, Christmas, was Sunday, and all day Porter's guns were thundering away at Fisher and shaking the windows in Wilmington, where the citizens were offering up their prayers for our protection from the enemy. Communication with Fort Fisher by land or telegraph was then cut off—the messages had been sent up to that time. Toward night sensational messages commenced to be brought up from below—one to the effect that the enemy were on the parapet at Fisher (in truth and in fact they never got closer than the stables, at least two or three hundred yards from the fort). Bragg sent Mrs. Bragg away that night at 9 P.M., in a special train, up the Weldon Road, and an officer who saw him at about 11 P.M. reported that the old gentleman seemed to be quite unnerved, and that his hand was very tremulous. Of course there was a great exodus of civilians from the place the next morning early, the fact that Mrs. Bragg had gone off acting as a key-note of alarm to others. By mid-day, however, Monday these sensational reports and stories were all quieted by the authenticated news that the enemy had re-embarked on the fleet, and that the attack had ceased. Then the fleet sailed, and every thing quieted down. The general impression was that there would not be another attack till after the spring equinox, in May, say, or the June following.

When Whiting returned to the city Bragg still continued in command, and his friends and himself evidently took the credit of having foiled Butler's attempt. Bragg was a friend and favorite of Mr. Davis. He had sided with General Taylor in Taylor's quarrel with General Scott, and Mr. Davis was a man who never forgot his friends nor forgave his enemies. He seemed determined to sustain Bragg at all events, though the feeling throughout the whole army, and in fact the South, was against that General. When Wilmington was known to be threatened, and Bragg was sent there, the Richmond *Examiner* simply remarked, "Good-by, Wilmington!" and the prediction was verified.

Whiting, after the first attack, wrote to Bragg, advising that in case of another attack, which would probably be made, to prevent surprise he

would advise that Hagood's South Carolina brigade, numbering over 2000 effective men, be thrown into Fort Fisher, the garrison of which consisted of one raw, inexperienced regiment that had never smelled powder except in the first attack, and which did not number even over 700 effective men. Hagood's troops were veterans, and had been in many a battle. He also advised that the three other brigades of Hoke's division be placed along about the spot where the Federals had first landed, and be intrenched so as to prevent a landing above the fort. Wise precautions if they had been adopted. Bragg indorsed on the letter of advice from Whiting that he saw no necessity in carrying out those suggestions. It was the failure to carry out those suggestions that lost Wilmington. Had they been followed Wilmington would not have fallen when it did, nor Fisher have been taken. Instead, Bragg brought Hoke's division up about a half mile back of Wilmington, over twenty miles from the fort, and had a grand review there, in which he paraded himself in a new suit of uniform presented to him by his admirers in Wilmington.

Whiting's prediction about a surprise was shortly to be verified. Thursday night, the 10th of January, '65, the fleet again appeared off Fisher, this time through Bragg's imbecility, to do its work effectually, and Friday morning the citizens of Wilmington were aroused by the booming of Porter's cannon a second time opening on Fisher. When the news came up at midnight that the fleet had again appeared, the band of Hoke's division were in town serenading, the officers were visiting, and the men scattered about—Bragg no doubt asleep in fancied security.

Of the capture of Fort Fisher, and the subsequent inevitable loss of Wilmington, I shall not speak. These events have passed into history. My purpose has been simply to portray the aspect of Wilmington when blockaded.

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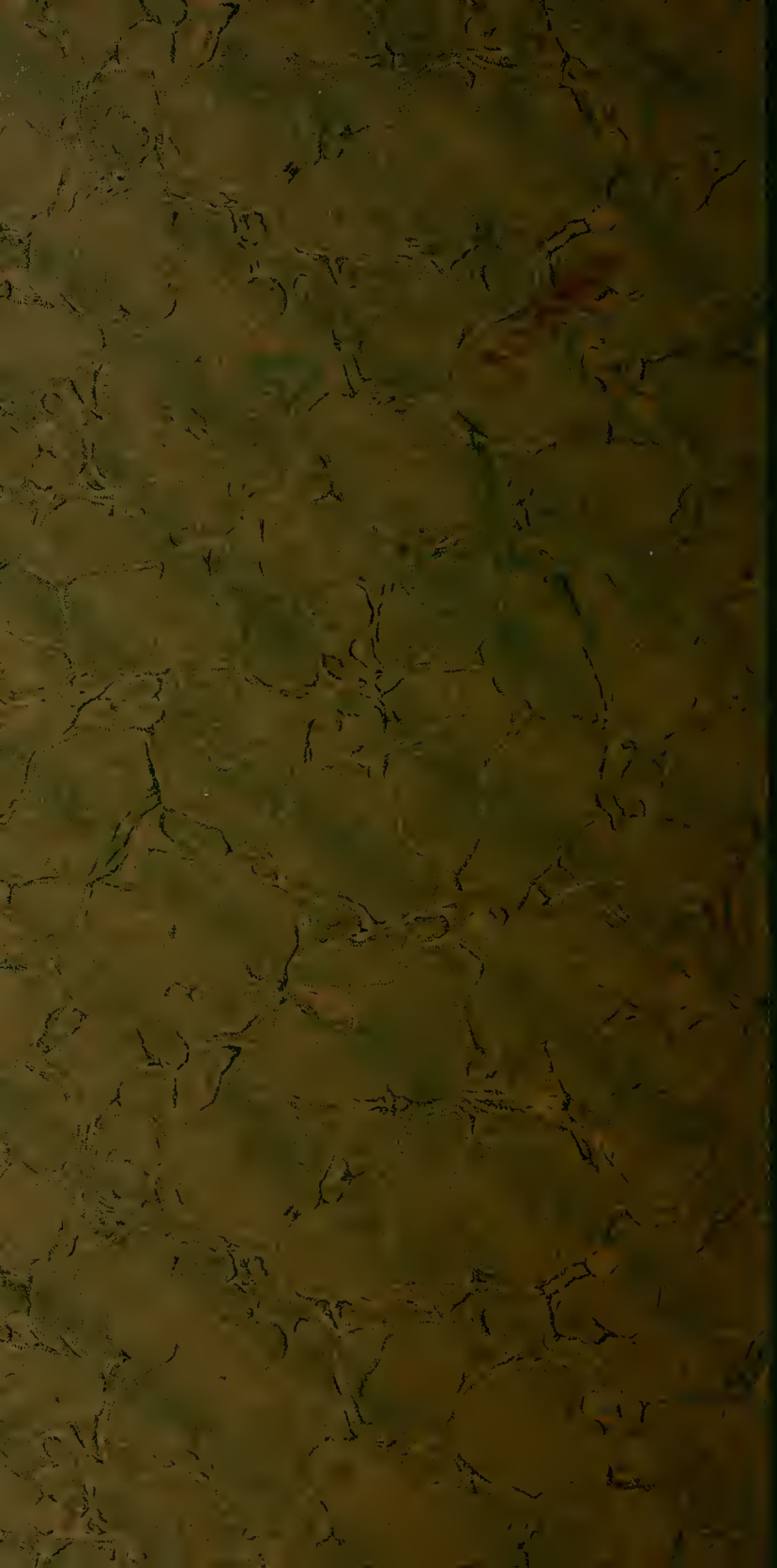
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